

Lonestar plan to burn tires for fuel draws fire

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SANTA CRUZ — The local Greenpeace chapter has joined protests of proposed tire-burning by the Davenport cement plant, saying it will foul both air and water, as well as create difficult-to-dispose-of toxic residues.

Still in the testing stage, the tire burning so far has met with favor from RMC Lonestar officials. They hail tires as a cheaper fuel source and a solution to the mountains of tires discarded each year.

Preliminary tests show that the tire-burning emissions are no worse than those from the coal the plant now uses, according to regional air quality officials.

But Greenpeace Santa Cruz says those arguments are a smoke screen for releasing toxic chemicals into the environment.

"This is a toxic-waste incineration," said Becky Petersen of Greenpeace Santa Cruz. "... The industry is trying to pass this off as a good way to get rid of piles of tires accumulating. We're saying, 'Let's recycle them. Chip them down, make into new tires.'"

Greenpeace, along with a local anti-tire-burning group called Zero Tolerance Toxic Campaign is urging people to write letters to county planning officials, and to attend upcoming meetings of the Planning Commission to register their protest.

A demonstration is planned for noon Fri-

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day on the steps of the County Government Center.

"The public has absolutely nothing to gain from this," Petersen said. "The marine sanctuary could be affected. Employees at the cement plant will be exposed to it. The only people who will benefit is Lone Star."

RMC Lonestar has been trying to get the process approved for some two years, conducting increasingly extensive tests.

Eventually, the cement plant hopes to replace 20 percent of the coal used. That would save as much as 70 tons of coal daily, plant officials say, and help the plant to stay competitive with foreign operations.

The most recent tests were in August, when 4,000 to 7,000 tires per day were burned along with coal over a two-week period to evaluate the resulting emissions.

Results of those tests are expected in the next two weeks. They will be used by the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District to prepare a report, which should be issued by January 1993.

The air board has taken no position on the proposal, said Fred Thoits, an engineer there, but has looked at preliminary tests.

"So far, the results of earlier tests show that the burning tires give off about the same chemicals as the current practice of burning coal," Thoits said.

Burning tires is being tested elsewhere, he said. The process has found a powerful advocate in the form of the state's Solid Waste Management Waste Board, Thoits said, which sees it as a solution to the ever-mounting piles of discarded tires.

But the proposed tire-burning has many hoops to jump through locally before the cement plant will be allowed to use it.

The county must approve changes in the company's use permit. Approval is also needed from regional air and water boards, the Coastal Commission and the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

"We're hoping to stop it at one of those places, or all of them," said Petersen.

Denise Holbert, county planning commissioner and aide to Third District Supervisor Gary Patton, said she's received one phone call against the tire-burning. Patton has received a couple of letters against the project also, she said.

Holbert said she was skeptical of the project initially, envisioning thick clouds of black smoke fouling the air.

But it's not so, she said, after visiting while the tires were being burned. While there may be invisible contaminants, she said, otherwise "you can't tell any difference."